Sickness Absence Policy
Policy

Your attendance really does count. The Manchester College is committed to improving the health, wellbeing and attendance of all its employees. We value the contribution our employees make to our success and have designed this policy and monitoring procedures accordingly.

Aims and objectives

This policy aims to provide employees with support during genuine periods of sickness, while balancing this with the need to control the level and detrimental impact of absence on the college, employees and students. The college’s key objectives are to

- achieve optimum attendance while also providing support to employees
- create a culture and working environment which is conducive to health and wellbeing
- record, monitor and manage attendance robustly, using triggers to ensure prompt and appropriate action is taken to reduce levels of absence where these are considered unsatisfactory
- change the attitudes, behaviours and perceptions around fitness for work
- ensure every employee takes personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing to maintain the highest possible levels of attendance

Whatever your role in the college, we all have a part to play in achieving college objectives.

The college will endeavour to maintain a fair, equitable and consistent approach to managing sickness and in return employees are expected to be responsible and comply with all policies and procedures.

Costs of absence

Stop and think about the last time you were absent from work. What was the impact of this on your colleagues, your work, students and the college? When a member of staff is absent from work there is a direct and indirect cost involved.

Health and wellbeing

The wellbeing of employees is paramount, we recognise the need to be proactive and promote health and wellbeing. The college operates a wide range of initiatives, which include access to fitness centres, supply of clean drinking water, provision of healthy eating options in our catering facilities and access to Occupational Health advice. The Health and Wellbeing Policy is on the college intranet.

You also have a role in improving your own health and wellbeing by maintaining a healthy diet, regular exercise, health education and health checks, and a better balance between home and work.

Avoid

- smoking
- substance abuse, including drinking excess alcohol
- activities that may affect attendance at work
Responsibilities

Your responsibilities

Preventing sickness absence

- Take care of yourself.
- Self-awareness and early intervention to address issues before they lead to absence.
- Alert your manager to any problems you may be having at work, which may be having an impact on your health, performance and attendance.
- Ensure that you use the appropriate procedures to request time off from work for reasons other than sickness, such as dealing with family/home responsibilities, seeking advice from your manager as necessary.

Reporting sickness absence

- Telephone your manager at least one hour before your normal start time, unless agreed otherwise and advise them of the following
  - reason for absence and how this is preventing you from attending work
  - whether you are planning to see your doctor
  - how long you are likely to be absent
  Be prepared for your manager to ask further questions and the offer of support and advice.
- You must contact your manager each day of your absence, unless agreed otherwise with your manager.
- An email, text message or any other means of communication are unacceptable when reporting sickness absence.
- Failure to notify your manager of your absence will be considered as unauthorised absence and you will not be paid.
- Please be aware that failure to follow the absence procedures may be considered as a disciplinary offence, unless there is an exceptional reason for this.
- If you are admitted to hospital, a hospital medical certificate should be obtained.
- If your manager is not available when you call, please speak to another manager or senior manager in your department. Your manager may give you a call back. Unless you are severely ill, you are expected to call in person.
- If you are absent for eight calendar days or more, please obtain a medical certificate from the eighth calendar day of absence.
- Send your medical certificate to your line manager immediately.
- Inform your manager, at least one day before your medical certificate expires, of your intention to return to work or tell them that another fit note has been issued.
- If you feel able to return to work before the date given by your doctor, you must get the doctor to sign you back before you return.

During your sickness absence

- Agree frequency of contact with your manager to tell them how you are feeling and to discuss options for returning to work when you are feeling better.
- Follow medical advice and avoid doing anything that may hinder your recovery.
- Alert your manager to any issues that you may be worried about that could be addressed.
- If you are absent for eight calendar days or more, please obtain a medical certificate from the eighth calendar day of absence.
Upon your return to work

- Confirm your return to work with your manager.
- Complete the Self-certified Sickness Absence Notification/Return to Work Form on your return.
- Attend a Return to Work interview with your manager.

It is essential that the reporting procedure is followed to ensure that you receive any pay entitlements. Pay may be withheld or withdrawn if the policy is not complied with.

Return to Work interview

- Your manager will arrange a Return to Work interview. The purpose of this is to
  - understand the reasons for absence and to authorise your self-certification form
  - establish if there are any underlying reasons for absence
  - review your attendance record and provide any support and advice
  - update you on work developments
  - clarify the policy and procedures
- If your attendance level is deemed unsatisfactory, attendance objectives may be set during this meeting.

Management responsibilities

New employees

- Ensure all new employees have read and understand the Sickness Absence Policy and are fully aware of their responsibilities
- Give the employee your contact details

Employee telephones in to notify manager of absence

- Gather the following information during this conversation
  - establish how the employee is and ascertain the reason for absence
  - what is preventing the employee from attending work
  - are they planning to see a doctor
  - agree frequency of contact
  - predicted date of return

Creating the right environment

- Create an environment that encourages employees to be open and share issues that could impact on their performance and attendance
- Knowing your employees well will help you to identify issues before they become a problem
- Early intervention and the ability to communicate effectively with staff will create an environment conducive to health and wellbeing
Managing absence

- Early and regular contact with employee - agree timing, frequency and type of contact
- Ensure employees follow the absence procedure correctly and are aware of the consequences of not doing so
- Inform your department’s sickness absence reporter of the sickness absence immediately
- Conduct a Return to Work interview with all employees after all periods of sickness absence
- Document the Return to Work interview and summarise the key points agreed on the Return to Work section of the Self-certified Sickness Absence Notification/Return to Work Form
- Authorise and return the original Self-certified Sickness Absence Notification/Return to Work Form to the Human Resources Department promptly, along with any other medical certificates. Keep a copy for your file
- Ensure the employee has a record of any further actions that have been agreed
- Document conversations and meetings - keep a copy and send the originals to the Human Resources Department
- Liaise with the Human Resources Department for advice and guidance as required, for example, if you are concerned about the reason for absence not being genuine
- Notify the Human Resources Department when sick pay is to be withheld or withdrawn if the policy is not complied with
- Monitor the cost and impact of absence in your department and use absence reports produced monthly to improve future attendance
- Identify and manage short-term persistent and long-term sickness in line with the Bradford Factor automatic trigger procedure
- Manage the Formal Capability/Formal Disciplinary procedure as required
- Facilitate reasonable adjustments and rehabilitation programmes back into work, as required

Sickness absence reporter responsibility

Recording absence

Complete the sickness absence spreadsheet and forward to the HR mailbox: Sickness absence by Tuesday of the following week, reporting ONLY sickness absence for the previous week (Monday to Friday).

Human Resources responsibilities

Advice

Provide advice and guidance to managers as required, focusing on complex absence cases

Absence training

Develop and train managers to provide a working environment conducive to health and wellbeing. Provide tools and techniques to help managers to manage absence effectively

Produce absence reports

Production of monthly absence data, detailing costs, reasons, absence levels and areas of concern

Liaise with Occupational Health and external support organisations

Act as an intermediary between managers and external support organisations. Provide referrals to Occupational Health

Record and monitor

Input absence figures and ensure correct payment for sickness absence as outlined in the policy

Challenge and embed

Challenge managers on their management of sickness absence, providing feedback, recommendations for improvement and support to help achieve attendance objectives
Occupational Health responsibilities

Key services
Occupational Health provision includes: pre-employment health screening, absence management strategies, case management, face-to-face or remote consultation with an Occupational Health nurse, risk assessment, workplace assessments, health surveillance, fast-track access to care

Face-to-face or remote consultation
Occupational Health will provide a source of independent, expert advice and guidance on an employee's fitness for work, prognosis for successful return to work and support with rehabilitating employees back into the workplace after a long period of absence

Written reports
Occupational Health will provide a report following every consultation, which will consist of meaningful, clear and actionable advice

Advice and guidance
A nationwide advice line and website are available to support the Human Resources Department with queries
Managing Persistent Short-term Absence

If an employee is frequently absence for short periods, this can have a substantial impact on the college. It could mean

- disruption to colleagues, students and the college
- additional work for your colleagues
- huge demands on sick pay scheme
- an impact on your own performance

These reasons mean that your manager will need to investigate any persistent absence within your department.

Deal with short-term absence by

- conducting Return to Work interviews after every absence
- maintaining contact
- introducing the Bradford Factor trigger (review indicator)
- inviting employees with unacceptable attendance to an Attendance Review meeting to agree an action plan
- referring an employee to Occupational Health, where necessary
- invoking the Formal Capability process

Maintaining contact

You will be expected to contact your manager on each day of absence, at least one hour before your normal start time, unless your manager agrees an alternative contact arrangement.

Review indicator

Although it is important to treat each case on its own merits, it is essential that we apply the same standards to all employees. Therefore, in addition to the standard Return to Work interviews conducted after each absence, we will be introducing a review indicator, which will act as a ‘trigger’, resulting in an invitation to an Attendance Review meeting.

The formula adopted by the college is known as the Bradford Factor. This is a simple calculation that allows us to measure one employee’s series of short-term absences against another employee who takes fewer but longer absences.

An Attendance Review meeting will be triggered by having a Bradford Factor of 200 points or three occurrences in six months.

Attendance Review meeting

At this meeting, the manager will explore the reasons for absence, any underlying factors that the college needs to be aware of, and concerns about the level of sickness absence and its impact.

Where appropriate the manager will discuss the next steps/action plan that both the employee and the college can take to reduce the level of absence. The manager will document this conversation and send a copy to the Human Resources Department to place on file. The manager will also agree a period over which the employee’s attendance will be monitored, in order to evaluate whether there has been any improvement.

If there is insufficient improvement in the employee’s level of attendance, the college will instigate the Formal Capability/Formal Disciplinary process.
Formal Capability procedure

If an employee’s absence still gives cause for concern, and has not improved, then it may be necessary to invoke the Formal Capability procedure. This consists of three stages.

Stage 1

- The employee is sent an invitation to attend a Formal Capability hearing (Stage 1), at least two working days’ notice will be given. The employee may bring a union representative or colleague to the meeting.
- The employee will be given the opportunity to explain their view of their absence levels.
- Following a full and frank discussion about the absence level, impact on the college, medical evidence, personal responsibility and support, the meeting will be adjourned to make a decision.
- When the meeting has reconvened, the decision and reason for that decision will be given and objectives for improving attendance will be set. This could result in a First Written Caution, informal warning or no warning.

- Minimum sickness absence levels will be agreed, along with a monitoring period, review date and further support required. Failure to meet these levels will result in further formal action being taken.
- A letter confirming the outcome of this meeting will be sent to the employee within five working days of the meeting.
- The employee has the right to appeal against the decision, within five working days of receiving the outcome letter, outlining the reasons for their appeal.

Stage 2

- The employee is sent an invitation to attend a Formal Capability hearing (Stage 2), at least two working days’ notice will be given. The employee may bring a union representative or colleague to the meeting.
- The employee will be given the opportunity to explain their view of their absence levels.
- Following a full and frank discussion about their failure to meet agreed attendance objectives, absence level, impact on the college, medical evidence, personal responsibility and support, the meeting will be adjourned to make a decision.
- When the meeting has reconvened, the decision and reason for that decision will be given and objectives for improving attendance will be set. This could result in a Final Written Caution/lengthen review period for consistency in attendance levels.

- Minimum sickness absence levels will be agreed, along with a monitoring period, review date and further support required. Failure to meet these levels will result in further formal action being taken, that is, demotion, reassignment or dismissal.
- A letter confirming the outcome of this meeting will be sent to the employee within five working days of the meeting.
- The employee has the right to appeal against the decision, within five working days of receiving the outcome letter, outlining the reasons for their appeal.
Stage 3

• Managers must ensure that the Human Resources Department has been consulted prior to this meeting.

• The employee is sent an invitation to attend a Formal Capability hearing (Stage 3), at least two working days’ notice will be given. The employee may bring a union representative or colleague to the meeting.

• The employee will be given the opportunity to explain their view of their absence levels.

• Following a full and frank discussion about their failure to meet agreed attendance objectives, absence level, impact on the college, medical evidence, personal responsibility and support, the meeting will be adjourned to make a decision.

• When the meeting has reconvened, the decision and reason for that decision will be given and next steps discussed, depending on the agreed outcome.

  - Demotion
    This option is only appropriate if the underlying cause of the sickness absence was attributable to the current role, for example, an employee suffering from excessive stress and where a demotion to a less demanding role would alleviate that stress and result in reduced absence. Advise the employee of the details of their new role, the impact on grade, salary and other benefits. Issue a revised letter/contract of employment detailing the changes.

  - Reassignment to another role within the college
    This option is only appropriate if the reason for the sickness absence can be wholly attributed to the role that is currently being performed and that medical opinion is that a change would improve attendance. This will need to be a vacancy and the employee will need to apply in the normal way. If the individual is unsuccessful, another meeting would be required and the likely result would be dismissal. Notice would need to be given and the employee has the right to representation, as before.

  - Dismissal
    Advise the employee of dismissal and whether they will be put on garden leave for their contractual notice or if they will receive pay in lieu.

• A letter confirming the outcome of this meeting will be sent to the employee within five working days of the meeting.

• The employee has the right to appeal against the decision, within five working days of receiving the outcome letter, outlining the reasons for their appeal.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS PROCEDURE DOES NOT APPLY TO PREGNANCY-RELATED ILLNESSES DURING PREGNANCY OR MATERNITY LEAVE.
Managing Long-term Absence

A period of absence is considered long-term after four weeks and where an early return looks unlikely. Long-term absence can be handled more effectively through early intervention. The longer the absence, the less likely the employee is to return to work. The primary aim in dealing with long-term absence cases is to facilitate the individual’s return to work.

Wherever possible, the best approach is to help an employee to remain in work, or to return sooner by making some adjustments to their working conditions. A well-managed return to work with the right support in place, for example, referral to Occupational Health, can reduce the long-term effects absence can have on an employee’s physical and psychological wellbeing.

Deal with long-term absence by

- early intervention
- maintaining contact
- home visit after four weeks’ absence
- referral to Occupational Health
- seeking medical opinions from the employee’s GP or consultant
- return to work support
- changing perceptions of fitness for work
- preventing illness and promoting wellbeing
- changing perceptions
- maintaining contact
- home visit after four weeks’ absence
- referral to Occupational Health
- seeking medical opinions from the employee’s GP or consultant
- return to work support
- changing perceptions of fitness for work
- preventing illness and promoting wellbeing

Early intervention

In circumstances where an absence is anticipated to be long-term, for example, a stress-related case, then a referral to Occupational Health may be made immediately.

Maintaining contact

Communication during any period of absence is important so that the employee can keep their manager up to date about their ill health and how best to manage their return to work, also to ensure that employees can be kept up to date about any changes while they are absent.

The college also recognises that although these should be kept to a minimum there may be occasions where it is necessary to contact the employee about operational issues, for example, to cancel planned meetings.

The manager will agree the frequency of contact with the employee during periods of sickness absence, as a minimum on extended periods contact on a fortnightly basis would be recommended.

If the employee refuses contact with the college, without providing an adequate explanation, their entitlement to Occupational Sick Pay will cease.
Home visit after four weeks’ absence

When an employee has been off for more than four weeks, this is deemed as long-term sickness and the manager should arrange a home visit with the employee. This may take place at the employee’s home or an alternative, mutually convenient venue. This visit will be conducted by the employee’s manager, in conjunction with another manager or a Human Resources adviser.

Keeping in touch with absent employees is a key factor in helping them to return to work after long-term absence. This is an opportunity for managers to provide support to employees, which can help to facilitate their return.

Referral to Occupational Health

The college, working with you and your manager to balance both business and personal needs, employs an independent Occupational Health adviser. Occupational Health advisers provide support in a number of ways, they will

- look at your general health, the impact of your lifestyle on any ongoing conditions and will, if appropriate, recommend actions to help you to maintain good health
- provide specialist advice on health concerns
- advise on fitness for work
- help to rehabilitate you back into the workplace after a long period of absence
- fast-track access to care

Referral process

- A management referral form, along with a copy of your job description and absence record, will be sent to the Occupational Health adviser and you will be notified of your appointment
- Your appointment will be face-to-face or by telephone
- The Occupational Health adviser will assess your ability to fulfil your duties and determine if any further support is required
- The Occupational Health adviser will produce a summary report and may provide some recommendations. A copy will be sent to your manager and the Human Resources Department
- Your manager and the Human Resources Department will continue to liaise with the Occupational Health adviser of your progress until they no longer need to see you

In situations where the employee either refuses, or has agreed to the provision of a report by a college appointed doctor or Occupational Health specialist and unreasonably fails to attend an appointment, their entitlement to Occupational Sick Pay will cease.

When the medical report has been obtained, the employee will meet their line manager and a Human Resources adviser to discuss the content of the report and to determine appropriate steps to manage the employee’s return to work/support in their job role.
Seeking medical opinions from the employee’s GP or consultant

There may be times, where the involvement of an employee’s GP or consultant may be considered to help provide advice and guidance in order to support the college with facilitating a return to work or making reasonable adjustments. In these circumstances, the employee will be asked for their written consent and will be informed of their rights, in accordance with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988. The employee may withhold consent to the provision of the report and if they wish to do so, they must inform their manager in writing on receipt of the letter requesting consent. The employee’s entitlement to Occupational Sick Pay at this point will cease. If the employee does not respond to the request for medical evidence, the employee’s entitlement to Occupational Sick Pay will cease five working days after the employee has received the letter requesting their consent. If the employee does not give consent for the college to gain medical evidence about their ill health, the college will only be able to make decisions in relation to their continued employment based upon what is known.

The employee has the right to see the report at the discretion of their doctor, and to request amendments be made. It is the employee’s responsibility to make arrangements with their doctor to see the report.

Return to work support

Following a long period of absence, consideration will be given, where appropriate, to providing suitable assistance in returning to work.

The college believes that returning to work in some capacity as soon as the employee is able, will aid their return to work to their substantive job role. The line manager will discuss this with the employee during any period of absence and the employee is obliged to consider and inform the college whether they are able to undertake any alternative duties.

Any such work will form part of the documented return to work plan. The Occupational Health adviser may provide assistance with this process.

The type of support offered may include

- phased return to work
- reduced hours
- a gradual build up of duties
- adjustments to the working environment
- workplace assessment/provision of special equipment
- access to health and fitness advisers and centre

Phased return to work

An example of how a phased return would work in practice is detailed below.

If an employee works half a day or more it would be classed as a full working day.
If an employee works under half a day it would be classed as half a work day and half a sick day.

Employees will receive their salary for periods worked. Sickness will be recorded for periods not worked and the relevant sick pay given, that is, full pay, half pay or no pay. Phased returns will apply for limited periods and paid according to the entitlement.
Changing perceptions of fitness for work

Offering support and rehabilitation services to employees, to facilitate an earlier return to work, needs to be underpinned by a fundamental change in an individual’s perceptions around fitness for work - namely that it is inappropriate to be in work unless 100% fit and that being in work normally impedes recovery.

Recent research into the ‘health of Britain’s working age population’ has suggested that work can be good for health, and that healthcare professionals must adapt their advice to reflect the importance of remaining in work or returning to work whenever possible. This is about switching the focus to what individuals can do instead of what they cannot.

Preventing illness and promoting wellbeing

Employees have a fundamental personal responsibility for maintaining their own health. However, sometimes we all need help to guide us in the right direction. Therefore, the college is investing time and resources into promoting a Health and Wellbeing campaign throughout 2010.

Dismissals due to Ill Health

The college’s approach is to support and facilitate a return to work wherever possible following a period of ill health. There may be situations where an individual is not able to return to work. In these cases the college will seek medical evidence to determine the likely prognosis of an employee’s ill health and to explore with the employee, again taking medical advice if necessary, whether they can return to work in any capacity and with any adjustments. If a point is reached where the employee is unlikely to return to work in the foreseeable future, the college may take the decision to terminate their employment on the grounds of ill health.

If this action is felt to be necessary, the college will write to the employee to invite them to attend a meeting to discuss their ill health and continued employment with the college. This meeting may be held at the employee’s home and will normally be with their line manager and a Human Resources adviser. The employee will have the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a work colleague or a trade union representative. During the meeting the line manager will discuss with the employee their ill health and discussions to date, any medical advice/evidence and to explore again whether there is any possibility of the employee returning to work in any capacity or with any additional support. The employee will also be asked during the meeting whether there is anything that they wish to raise that would be relevant, before the college reaches its decision. The meeting will be adjourned and a decision made considering all the information discussed and anything that has been raised during the meeting. The employee will receive written confirmation of the college’s decision. This will normally be sent out within 10 working days of the decision being made.

Appeal

The employee has the right to appeal against the college’s decision. If they wish to do so, they should put their grounds for appeal in writing, within 10 working days of receiving the letter confirming the college’s decision. The letter of appeal should be addressed to the Human Resources adviser.
Employees will be eligible to the following payments, calculated on a 12 months rolling period, providing they meet the requirements of the sick pay policy and procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>OSP entitlement for full-time staff</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under six months’ service</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six months up to one year’s service</td>
<td>10 days half pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>During the second year of service</td>
<td>20 days full pay, then 20 days half pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>During the third year of service</td>
<td>30 days full pay, then 30 days half pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>During the fourth year of service</td>
<td>40 days full pay, then 40 days half pay</td>
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<td>During the fifth year of service</td>
<td>50 days full pay, then 50 days half pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>After five years’ service</td>
<td>60 days full pay, then 60 days half pay</td>
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Sick days entitlement will be paid pro-rata for part-time employees working less than five days a week

Payments under this scheme apply only to an employee’s personal sickness or injury. Any non-sick related absence, including sickness of a relative, does not apply.

The college reserves the right to:

- require a medical certificate to cover any period of sickness or injury
- withhold OSP where individuals do not comply with the absence reporting and certification requirements
- withhold OSP where individuals are under formal stages of the absence management procedures and there is little evidence of co-operation with the college to reduce absence to an acceptable level
- withhold OSP where individuals are under precautionary suspension pending investigation and/or disciplinary procedures, and are failing to attend scheduled investigation meetings or disciplinary hearings

The college has limited hardship funds to support loyal colleagues in cases of extreme and difficult circumstances, for example, terminal illness. Any hardship payments are at the sole and absolute discretion of the Principalship.

The gross amount of Statutory Sick Payments will be offset against Occupational Sick Pay entitlement.

When an employee is in receipt of OSP, following an accident, the college reserves the right to recover any such OSP paid to the employee, from a third party. It is the employee’s responsibility to inform the Payroll Department of any claim process that is commenced with a third party, so that the college’s claim for the OSP sum can be included as part of that claim.
Abuse of the sick pay scheme

In some circumstances, managers will have discretion regarding the payment of Occupational Sick Pay, allowing them to decline the payment. Examples of where the circumstances would allow managers to exercise their discretion to decline payment include:

- the employee’s failure to comply with the college’s notification/certification requirements
- evidence to suggest that the employee’s absence was not for a genuine reason - this will be raised with the employee and investigated
- where the employee’s incapacity has been caused by participation in a dangerous sport, hobby or activity and/or the employee’s conduct has prevented or slowed down their recovery
- the employee is not willing to discuss their sickness absence with their manager, Human Resources adviser or Occupational Health
- the employee has given false or misleading information concerning the reason for their absence

Employees are expected to co-operate fully with all reasonable requests surrounding their health and failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

Sickness absence and holiday pay

Employees are entitled to take paid holiday and should take their full entitlement during the leave year, even if this coincides with a period of sickness absence.

Employees on long-term sick absence are responsible for informing their manager of any holidays taken during their period of sickness and must request annual leave according to the normal rules.

Where an employee is on sick leave there is an expectation that they will attend any appointment or meetings arranged with them regarding their absence. This includes appointments with Occupational Health and meetings with the Human Resources Department and/or the employee’s manager. Where the employee is too sick to attend appointments and meetings then the college expects that it will be provided with confirmation of this from a medical adviser, whether that is the claimant’s GP, consultant, or Occupational Health. Where the employee is fit to attend an appointment or meeting but maintains that they are unavailable because of other commitments, for example, dentist appointment, childcare, then this will be explored with the employee as such commitments are not generally acceptable.

In circumstances where the college accepts the reason provided by the employee and the appointment or meeting is cancelled, the employee will be expected to take holiday to cover their absence for that day or part of that day.

Annual leave accrues during sickness absence. On termination of employment, an employee who has been on sick leave and has been unable to take all of their annual leave entitlement is entitled to a payment in lieu of their accrued untaken annual leave.

Employees who fall sick abroad

- must provide a contact name, contact number, postal and email address through which communications can be directed by the college
- must receive a medical certificate from their own GP when they return to this country in circumstances where they claim they are still sick
- require certification for the period of illness from a recognised GP/consultant in the country in which the illness occurred. This certificate must be sent by the employee to the college by the eighth day of absence
- must provide the college with a ‘fitness statement to return to work’ before they may return to work
Tackling Stress

What is stress?

Stress can be defined as a person's natural reaction to excessive pressure. It is not a disease, but excessive stress can lead to mental and physical illness. It is important to identify and deal with the causes of stress quickly and positively.

Sources, signs and symptoms of stress

- Work overload creates pressure
- Work underload creates pressure
- Home, family or social pressures can trigger stress
- Stress triggers can be small innocuous events
- Stress can be out of all proportion to the stimulus
- Stress affects the whole person - physical, behavioural, psychological, emotional and social consequences
- Stress symptoms vary from person to person

Pressure and performance stages

A reasonable amount of pressure can be good and can help to motivate you - short-term pressure is not usually a problem. However, in some cases, especially where pressures are intense and continuous, the effects of stress can be more damaging, leading to longer-term psychological problems and physical ill health.

Stress reaction types

Stress transmitters
People who are obviously under stress and unable to cope; their inappropriate behaviours can cause a stress reaction in others who then become tense, anxious or irritable

Stress dumpers
People who become stressed and get rid of it by ‘dumping’ their stress on someone else

Stress carriers
People who just take the stress on board and get on as best as they can
The four-way model of stress

This is a graphical representation of how stress works. Stress hinges on three factors: your personality, your coping mechanisms/strategies, and pressure. As the diagram shows, if your coping skills are greater than the pressure you are under, the effect will be positive, as you adapt and grow to the challenge. However, if the pressure exceeds your ability to cope, then the arrow moves the other way, leading to a negative, damaging effect.

The outcomes of pressure
The three-phase model

Phase 1 Change your physical state
Phase 2 Change your emotional state
Phase 3 Start to behave differently

Physical resources

- Healthy eating
- Stop smoking - it does not help you to stay healthy, even though you may think it relaxes you
- Avoid the harmful effects of alcohol - alcohol acts as a depressant and will not help you to tackle the problem
- Watch your caffeine intake - tea, coffee and soft drinks may contribute to you feeling more anxious
- Exercise regularly - it stimulates you and gives you more energy
- Try learning relaxation techniques - some people find it easier to cope with pressures, for example, meditation, reading, music or any other hobby
- Take responsibility for your wellbeing - recognise early signs of stress and get help

Behavioural resources

- Time management - thinking time each day to manage time and priorities
- Be realistic - do not set standards too high
- Assertiveness - deal with problems assertively and avoid stressful situations
- Communication skills
  - Reflect and learn from experiences
  - Do not hide your feelings - acknowledge them to yourself and share them with others, as appropriate
- Deal with tensions before they become too serious
- Channel your energies into solving the problem instead of worrying about it

Social resources

- Balancing home and work
- Social support network – speak to family and friends
- Get advice from your GP, counsellor or Occupational Health
- Speak to your manager if a problem is linked to work